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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2016
TAGS: PREL MARR KS
SUBJECT: USFK ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN NOTIFICATION
DELIVERED TO ROKG

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Yun. Reasons: 1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) On April 7, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and Embassy delivered to MND and MOFAT, respectively, DUSD Lawless' notification letter on environmental clean-up of closed USFK bases. USFK and Embassy also shared the text of a proposed USFK press release on its action plan for environmental clean-up and return of bases. In a preliminary response, MOFAT North America Division III Director Min Kyongho expressed serious concerns about the plan to issue a press statement. Using uncharacteristically strong expressions, Min stated that a public announcement at this stage, when Seoul and Washington were continuing to discuss the issue, was inappropriate and would complicate management of the sensitive matter. The ROKG had made great effort to keep the issue off the ROK media while the two governments were continuing to pursue a solution. USFK's press statement, Min predicted, would stir controversy and raise difficult questions for both sides. Min also expressed regret that while the notification letter appeared to indicate an effort to avoid the appearance of unilateral actions, the press release would highlight the unilateral aspect of USFK's plan. Requesting time to consider carefully both the notification letter and the proposed press statement, Min undertook to coordinate immediately within MOFAT and with relevant Ministries. Embassy understands similar concerns were conveyed to USFK by MND.

¶2. (U) Upon completion of its notification to MND/USFK proceeded with the issuance of the following press release.
Begin text:

YONGSAN GARRISON, Seoul, Republic of Korea -- United States Forces Korea announced today an action plan for the return of facilities and areas to the Republic of Korea which have been vacated by the United States Forces in South Korea.

The announcement culminates months of intensive consultations and reflects the enduring commitment of the United States to environmental stewardship around the world.

According to General B. B. Bell, Commander of United States Forces Korea, "We have worked very hard with Korean and U.S. experts to establish an action plan that protects the environment and expeditiously returns use of this very valuable land to the Korean people. The measures we are taking as part of this plan are more extensive than USFK has taken in previous returns of facilities and areas in Korea."

The plan includes a number of measures designed to address issues identified in joint ROK-US environmental surveys. For

example, the plan calls for the United States to remedy known, imminent, and substantial endangerments to human health and safety. The United States will also remove underground fuel storage tanks located in each of the camps to preclude future leaks.

In addition, the United States will initiate an advanced technology process for skimming fuel from the ground water at the few locations where this contamination was found. In resolving this important issue, all the closed facilities and areas will be returned to the Korean government quickly, as the actions are completed, upon formal notification to the

ROK government.

This new action plan will accelerate the relocation of USFK from Yongsan and other locations into two enduring hubs of installations, and reflects the strength and unity of the ROK-US alliance and the strong bond between our two nations.
End text.

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